

National Elk Refuge News – June 3, 2011

Refuge Participates in Unique Recycling Program



Refuge volunteers Steve and Sara Miller receive instructions from Margaret Wilson, a Park Planner from Grand Teton National Park.

Recycling at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center stepped up to a new level this week as the National Elk Refuge joined other public and private organizations to participate in a new program that recycles a specialized item common in bear country.

Many visitors purchase and carry bear-deterrent pepper spray while in the Jackson area, an effective and often recommended precaution for people hiking or recreating in areas where bears are often seen. Area hikers can encounter black bears on trails or in developed sites such as campgrounds and lake shores.

In the last few years, there has been an increase in the number of frontcountry grizzly bear sightings as their range has expanded further south, including locations in close proximity to visitor service areas. As a result, many travelers purchase bear spray but leave it behind when departing the area, unable to take the cylinders on commercial flights or no longer having a need for the deterrent.

In 2008, Yellowstone National Park and the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality agreed on the need for a recycling program to address the environmental concern

regarding the number of canisters ending up in landfills. A viable solution became a reality when three Montana State University engineering students designed a machine that would safely remove any remaining pepper oil and propellant from a bear spray cylinder; crush the container; and prepare it for recycling as high-quality aluminum. After the students' prototype was approved and funding was secured, a Montana-based firm used the research and principles to develop the first recycling machine.

The National Elk Refuge will serve



In 2009, Mark Gocke from the Wyoming Game & Fish Department led a training for Visitor Center staff on how to properly use a can of pepper spray. Participants in the training each had an opportunity to discharge an inert can of spray. The year, staff will be able to give visitors an option for recycling the product once they no longer have a need for its use.

as one of the many convenient collection sites located throughout the area. Visitor Center staff will receive training on how to safely collect and store the containers to reduce the chances of an accidental discharge.

Neighboring Grand Teton National Park will take the lead on regularly collecting the canisters from the Visitor Center and transporting them to the recycling unit located in Yellowstone National Park.

“Because of the Refuge’s proximity to an airport that serves much of the visiting public, we hope to be an effective partner in the program,” explained Refuge Manager Steve Kallin, who also serves as the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee’s Chairperson.

More information on the recycling program can be found at <http://www.bearsprayrecycling.info>.